

SECTION I

Summary of the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program

The Uniform Crime Reporting Program is a nationwide, cooperative statistical effort of over 16,000 city, county, and state law enforcement agencies voluntarily reporting data on crimes brought to their attention. During 1996, law enforcement agencies active in the UCR Program represented nearly 252 million United States inhabitants or 95 percent of the total population as established by the Bureau of the Census. The coverage amounted to 97 percent of the United States population in Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs), 90 percent of the population in cities outside metropolitan areas, and 87 percent of the rural population.

Since 1930, the FBI has administered the Program and issued periodic assessments of the nature and type of crime in the Nation. While the Program's primary objective is to generate a reliable set of criminal statistics for use in law enforcement administration, operation, and management, its data have over the years become one of the country's leading social indicators. The American public looks to Uniform Crime Reports for information on fluctuations in the level of crime, while criminologists, sociologists, legislators, municipal planners, the media, and other students of criminal justice use the statistics for varied research and planning purposes.

Historical Background

The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), recognizing a need for national crime statistics, formed the Committee on Uniform Crime Records in the 1920s to develop a system of uniform police statistics. Establishing offenses known to law enforcement as the appropriate measure, the Committee evaluated various crimes on the basis of their seriousness, frequency of occurrence, pervasiveness in all geographic areas of the country, and likelihood of being reported to law enforcement. After studying state criminal codes and making an evaluation of the recordkeeping practices in use, the Committee in 1929 completed a plan for crime reporting which became the foundation of the Uniform Crime Reporting Program.

Seven offenses were chosen to serve as an Index for gauging fluctuations in the overall volume and rate of crime. Known collectively as the Crime Index, these offenses included the violent crimes of murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault and the property crimes of burglary, larceny-theft, and motor vehicle theft. By congressional mandate, arson was added as the eighth Index offense in 1979.

During the early planning of the Program, it was recognized that the differences among criminal codes precluded a mere aggregation of state statistics to arrive at a national total. Further, because of the variances in punishment for the same

offenses in different state codes, no distinction between felony and misdemeanor crimes was possible. To avoid these problems and provide nationwide uniformity in crime reporting, standardized offense definitions by which law enforcement agencies were to submit data without regard for local statutes were formulated. The definitions used by the Program are set forth in Appendix II of this publication.

In January 1930, 400 cities collectively representing 20 million inhabitants in 43 states began participating in the UCR Program. Congress enacted Title 28, Section 534, of the United States Code authorizing the Attorney General to gather crime information that same year. The Attorney General, in turn, designated the FBI to serve as the national clearinghouse for the data collected. Since that time, data based on uniform classifications and procedures for reporting have been obtained from the Nation's law enforcement agencies.

Advisory Groups

Providing vital links between local law enforcement and the FBI in the conduct of the UCR Program are the Criminal Justice Information Systems Committees of the IACP and the National Sheriffs' Association (NSA). The IACP, as it has since the Program began, represents the thousands of police departments nationwide. The NSA encourages sheriffs throughout the country to participate fully in the Program. Both committees serve in advisory capacities concerning the UCR Program's operation.

To function in an advisory capacity concerning UCR policy and provide suggestions on UCR data usage, a Data Providers' Advisory Policy Board (APB) was established in August 1988. The Board operated until 1993 when a new Board to address all FBI criminal justice information services was approved. The Board functions in an advisory capacity concerning UCR policy and on data collection and use. The UCR Subcommittee of the Board ensures continuing emphasis on UCR-related issues.

The Association of State Uniform Crime Reporting Programs and committees on UCR within individual state law enforcement associations are also active in promoting interest in the UCR Program. These organizations foster widespread and more intelligent use of uniform crime statistics and lend assistance to contributors when the needs arise.

Redesign of UCR

While throughout the years the UCR Program remained virtually unchanged in terms of the data collected and disseminated, a broad utility had evolved for UCR by the 1980s. Recognizing the need for improved statistics, law enforcement called for a thorough evaluative study that would modernize the UCR Program. The FBI concurred with the need for an updated

Program and lent its complete support, formulating a comprehensive three-phase redesign effort. The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), the Department of Justice agency responsible for funding criminal justice information projects, agreed to underwrite the first two phases. Conducted by an independent contractor, these phases were structured to determine what, if any, changes should be made to the current Program. The third phase would involve implementation of the changes identified. Abt Associates Inc. of Cambridge, Massachusetts, overseen by the FBI, BJS, and a Steering Committee comprised of prestigious individuals representing a myriad of disciplines, commenced the first phase in 1982.

During the first phase, the historical evolution of the UCR Program was examined. All aspects of the Program, including the objectives and intended user audience, data items, reporting mechanisms, quality control, publications and user services, and relationships with other criminal justice data systems, were studied.

Early in 1984, a conference on the future of UCR, held in Elkridge, Maryland, launched the second phase of the study, which would examine potential futures for UCR and conclude with a set of recommended changes. Attendees at this conference reviewed work conducted during the first phase and discussed the potential changes that should be considered during phase two.

Findings from the first phase of the evaluation and input on alternatives for the future were also major topics of discussion at the seventh National UCR Conference in July 1984. Overlapping phases one and two was a survey of law enforcement agencies.

Phase two ended in early 1985 with the production of a draft, "Blueprint for the Future of the Uniform Crime Reporting Program." The study's Steering Committee reviewed the draft report at a March 1985 meeting and made various recommendations for revision. The Committee members, however, endorsed the report's concepts.

In April 1985, the phase two recommendations were presented at the eighth National UCR Conference. While various considerations for the final report were set forth, the overall concept for the revised Program was unanimously approved. The joint IACP/NSA Committee on UCR also issued a resolution endorsing the Blueprint.

The final report, the "Blueprint for the Future of the Uniform Crime Reporting Program," was released in the summer of 1985. It specifically outlined recommendations for an expanded, improved UCR Program to meet informational needs into the next century. There were three recommended areas of enhancement to the UCR Program. First, reporting of offenses and arrests would be made by means of an incident-based system. Second, collection of data would be accomplished on two levels. Agencies in level one would report important details about those offenses comprising the current Crime Index, their victims, and arrestees. Law enforcement agencies covering populations of over 100,000 and a sampling of smaller agencies would be included in level two, which would collect expanded detail on all significant offenses. The third proposal involved introducing a quality assurance program.

To begin implementation of NIBRS, the FBI awarded a contract to develop new offense definitions and data elements

for the redesigned system. The work involved (a) revising the definitions of certain Index offenses, (b) identifying additional significant offenses to be reported, (c) refining definitions for both, and (d) developing data elements (incident details) for all UCR offenses in order to fulfill the requirements of incident-based reporting versus the current summary reporting.

Concurrent with the preparation of the data elements, the FBI studied the various state systems to select an experimental site for implementation of the redesigned Program. In view of its long-standing incident-based Program and well-established staff dedicated solely to UCR, the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED) was chosen. The SLED agreed to adapt its existing system to meet the requirements of the redesigned Program and collect data on both offenses and arrests relating to the newly defined offenses.

To assist SLED with the pilot project, offense definitions and data elements developed under the private contract were put at the staff's disposal. Also, FBI automated data processing personnel developed "Automated Data Capture Specifications" for use in adapting the state's data processing procedures to incorporate the revised system. The BJS supplied funding to facilitate software revisions needed at the state level. Testing of the new Program was completed in late 1987.

Following the completion of the pilot project conducted by SLED, the FBI produced a draft set of guidelines for an enhanced UCR Program. Law enforcement executives from around the country were then invited to a conference in Orange Beach, Alabama, where the guidelines were presented for final review.

During the conference, three overall endorsements were passed without dissent. First, that there be established a new, incident-based national crime reporting system; second, that the FBI manage this Program; and third, that an Advisory Policy Board composed of law enforcement executives be formed to assist in the direction and implementation of the new Program.

Information about the redesigned UCR Program, called the National Incident-Based Reporting System, or NIBRS, is contained in four documents produced subsequent to the Orange Beach Conference. Volume 1, *Data Collection Guidelines*, contains a system overview and descriptions of the offenses, offense codes, reports, data elements, and data values used in the system. Volume 2, *Data Submission Specifications*, is for the use of state and local systems personnel who are responsible for preparing magnetic tapes/floppy disks/etc., for submission to the FBI. Volume 3, *Approaches to Implementing an Incident-Based Reporting (IBR) System*, is for use by computer programmers, analysts, etc., responsible for developing a state or local IBR system which will meet NIBRS' reporting requirements. Volume 4, *Error Message Manual*, contains designations of mandatory and optional data elements, data element edits, and error messages.

A NIBRS edition of the *UCR Handbook* has been produced to assist law enforcement agency data contributors implementing NIBRS within their departments. This document is geared toward familiarizing local and state law enforcement personnel with the definitions, policies, and procedures of NIBRS. The

book does not contain the technical coding and data transmission requirements presented in Volumes 1 through 4.

NIBRS will collect data on each single incident and arrest within 22 crime categories. For each offense known to police within these categories, incident, victim, property, offender, and arrestee information will be gathered when available. The goal of the redesign is to modernize crime information by collecting data presently maintained in law enforcement records; the enhanced UCR Program is, therefore, a by-product of current records systems. The integrity of UCR's long-running statistical series will, of course, be maintained.

It became apparent during the development of the prototype system that the level one and level two reporting proposed in the "Blueprint" might not be the most practical approach. Many state and local law enforcement administrators indicated that the collection of data on all pertinent offenses could be handled with more ease than could the extraction of selected ones. While "Limited" participation, equivalent to the "Blueprint's" level one, will remain an option, it appears that most reporting jurisdictions, upon implementation, will go immediately to "Full" participation, meeting all NIBRS data submission requirements.

Implementing NIBRS will be at a pace commensurate with the resources, abilities, and limitations of the contributing law enforcement agencies. The FBI was able to accept NIBRS data as of January 1989, and 10 state-level UCR Programs (Colorado, Idaho, Iowa, Massachusetts, Michigan, North Dakota, South Carolina, Utah, Vermont, and Virginia) and 3 individual law enforcement agencies in the state of Texas are now supplying data in the NIBRS format. An additional 25 state agencies, 8 local law enforcement agencies in states not having state-level programs, and 5 federal agencies (the Departments of Commerce, Interior, and Defense-Air Force, Federal Protective Service, and the FBI) have submitted test tapes or disks containing the expanded data. Eight other state agencies, agencies in the District of Columbia and Guam, and other federal agencies are in various stages of planning and development.

Recent Developments

CRIME IN THE UNITED STATES — A change has been made to this year's edition of *Crime in the United States*. Section II, "Crime Index Offenses Reported," has been expanded to include a presentation on hate crime statistics. Incidents motivated by bias involve the traditional offenses collected by the UCR Program; therefore, including current hate crime data in the publication will provide another perspective of crime in the Nation. The complete 1996 edition of *Hate Crime Statistics* is tentatively scheduled for release in the fall.

UCR RELOCATION — The UCR Program has completed the move to West Virginia. In Appendix VI, the new telephone numbers of each UCR unit are listed. The FBI headquarters' numbers will no longer transfer to the new site.

DATA USE BROCHURE — In early 1997, a brochure entitled *Uniform Crime Reporting Statistics: Their Proper Use* was published. As its title indicates, the purpose of this publication is to advise UCR data users about the proper employment of FBI-provided statistics. While UCR data are sometimes used to compile rankings of states, cities, counties, or colleges and

universities, the FBI has long cautioned against such misleading analyses which lead to inaccurate perceptions of crime in these various locales. At the request of the CJIS Advisory Policy Board and law enforcement officials across the Nation, the UCR staff prepared the pamphlet addressing these issues in an effort to discourage the practice of ranking on the basis of crime data alone. It is available free upon request.

NIBRS IMPLEMENTATION — In 1995, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS, U.S. Department of Justice), entered into a cooperative agreement with SEARCH, the National Consortium for Justice Information and Statistics, to identify impediments to NIBRS implementation. Under the joint direction of BJS and the FBI and guided by a Steering Committee, this project was initiated to (1) identify the most promising and cost effective approaches to encouraging wider and more rapid adoption of NIBRS, (2) identify the greatest impediments to full NIBRS participation, and (3) develop recommendations to address these obstacles.

As a first step in understanding agencies' problems with implementing NIBRS, the SEARCH project staff conducted a detailed survey of the Nation's 64 largest local law enforcement agencies. Next, representatives from the target agencies and their state UCR/NIBRS programs were invited to participate in regional focus groups hosted by SEARCH in five locations throughout the Nation.

Based upon survey data and information gained through the focus groups, several recommendations were formulated including: (1) the development of standard analytic methodologies that demonstrate how NIBRS data will be used in federal, state, and local reports; (2) intensive research into software and data input strategies; and (3) increased assistance to local agencies in upgrading their records management systems and implementing Incident-Based Reporting systems. The NIBRS Project Steering Committee, the UCR Subcommittee of the CJIS Advisory Policy Board, and the CJIS Advisory Policy Board have offered continued support to the project. Copies of the complete report are available in printed or in electronic format. SEARCH reports and other information are available on the World Wide Web Site located at <http://www.nibrs.search.org>

QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW OF UCR DATA — To further its goal to accurately, completely, and uniformly reflect local, state, and national crime statistics, UCR is implementing a Quality Assurance Review (QAR) for both summary and incident-based data. The purpose of the voluntary QAR is to increase the reliability and validity of crime statistics, achieve compliance with required procedures and correct errors within a system, and increase an agency's ability to report accurately with meaningful results. Designed to be a workable, supportive analysis of a system and its data, the QAR will focus on coding and classification procedures, clearances, property values, resubmission of errors, and arrests. The QAR staff began pilot reviews to assess its planned processes in June of 1997. This pilot review process will continue to be assessed and adjusted in order to best assist UCR's participating agencies in their objective of collecting accurate, dependable crime data.